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Terrence S. Donahue, Acting Administrator **September 1989**

Communitywide Responses Crucial for Dealing With Youth Gangs

by Dan Bryant

Youth gangs and their illegal activities are continuing to escalate around the Nation despite intensive efforts by law enforcement and prosecutors to curb them, according to experts who addressed a national youth gang conference in Los Angeles.

"Today we are arresting more gang members than ever before; we are getting more convictions than ever before; and we are getting longer sentences than ever before. But ironically, we have more gangs than ever before. Arrest and prosecution are not the deterrent that we expected them to be," Frank Radke of the Chicago Police Department told the conference.

Radke was one of 14 experts who addressed the conference sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA) assisted with the conference.

The conference, which highlighted the need for cities to adopt coordinated, systemwide strategies to address youth gang problems, was designed to help communities develop such strategies.

OJJDP invited 19 metropolitan cities where youth gangs are just beginning to emerge to send teams of policymakers to the conference. Experts from Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami—cities with chronic youth gang problems—provided the teams with a national perspective on the youth gang issue and presented strategies they could develop to respond effectively to youth gangs (see box on following page for those making presentations).

From the Administrator:

The escalation of youth gang violence has left many communities virtually unprepared to provide an adequate response to a growing national dilemma. Much of this violence is drug-related, spurred on by the illegal, yet enormous, profits drug dealers earn.

The fierce circle of drugs, profits, and violence threatens the freedom and public safety of citizens from coast to coast. It holds in its grip large jurisdictions and small ones, urban areas and rural ones.

Although there are no prepackaged solutions to the many issues of youth gangs, one thing is crystal clear: youth gangs demand immediate responses. And these responses must consist of a coordinated, team strategy that includes the support of the entire community—schools, law enforcement, courts, corrections, and community service agencies.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) held a national conference to provide policymakers from 19 cities an opportunity to learn about the extent of gang violence and the steps necessary to develop communitywide responses.

Because we believe it is critical that any community facing the threat of youth gangs be prepared to respond effectively, we are sharing the information presented at this conference by some of the country's leading experts on juvenile gangs. We hope that juvenile justice policymakers and community leaders will use the knowledge and experience of these experts to develop their own strategies and to rid their communities of youth gang violence and drug trafficking.

Terrence S. Donahue
Acting Administrator

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Cities participating in the conference were: San Diego, California; Sacramento, California; San Antonio, Texas; Phoenix, Arizona; Seattle, Washington; Tacoma, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; Reno, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; Kansas City, Missouri; Omaha, Nebraska; Indianapolis, Indiana; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Boston, Massachusetts; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Columbus, Ohio; and Louisville, Kentucky.

Each sent a team to the conference that included a police chief, district attorney, juvenile court judge, school superintendent, community service organization representative, and director of corrections or chief probation officer. The agencies these individuals represent cover the entire spectrum of the juvenile justice system, including prevention, intervention, adjudication, and supervision. Because these individuals control the majority of resources for juvenile services and develop and implement policies for their communities, it is essential that they participate in developing a coordinated, systemwide gang strategy.

Illegal gang activity growing worse

Conference speakers all agreed that illegal youth gang activity is increasing at an alarming rate, both in cities with chronic gang problems and in those just beginning to experience them.

In Los Angeles, the growth has been dramatic, with the number of gangs increasing 71 percent between 1985 and 1988, according to Commander Lorne Kramer of the Los Angeles Police Department. The number of gang-related homicides increased 71 percent as well, Kramer said.

The gang situation in Miami has "exploded" since 1984, according to Andrew Hague from the Dade County Attorney's Office. Officials have documented 52 active street gangs in Miami this year, with recent figures indicating about 3,500 active gang members in Dade County.

Besides being mobile, Dade County gangs are very heavily armed, Hague said, adding it's not uncommon for police to retrieve very sophisticated weapons, including AK 47's, MAC 10's, derringers, and 9mm's, when stopping suspicious vehicles. As a result, the Miami Police Department now routinely issues 9mm guns to its officers.

Ohio also has a significant gang problem, according to Dr. Ronald Huff who recently completed a 2-year study of youth gangs in the State. Although gangs do not contribute profoundly to the overall crime rate, Huff found that they do create a high level of fear in communities. Police chiefs from Ohio told Huff that they were more concerned about the violent quality of gang offenses than about the number of offenses.

Huff said Cleveland has more than 50 separately named gangs, of which 15 to 20 are active. In Columbus, he identified 20 separately named gangs; about 15 are active.

Gangs not organized

Although it is well known that gang members are key players in the illegal drug trade, it is not clear to what extent drug trafficking is an organized gang function.

Conference speakers

- Frank Radke, Commanding Officer, Gang Crimes Section, Chicago Police Department
- Ira Reiner, District Attorney, Los Angeles
- Commander Lorne Kramer, Bureau of Special Investigations, Los Angeles Police Department
- Captain Raymond Gott, Commander, Juvenile Operations Office, Los Angeles Sheriff's Office
- Captain Michael Frazier, Commander, Community Relations Bureau, Phoenix Police Department
- Dr. Irving Spergel, Principal Investigator, OJJDP-sponsored National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Project, University of Chicago
- Dr. Michael Schumacher, Chief Probation Officer, Orange County, California
- Dr. Ronald Stephens, Executive Director, National School Safety Center, Pepperdine University, Encino, California
- Andrew Hague, Prosecuting Attorney, Dade County State's Attorney's Office, Miami, Florida
- Dr. C. Ronald Huff, Professor, Ohio State University
- Eddie Hill, Cocaine Desk, Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, D.C.
- John Featherly, Cocaine Desk, Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, D.C.
- Charles Sarabyn, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms, Washington, D.C.
- David Binney, Drug Section Chief, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.
- Michael Genelin, head deputy of the Hardcore Gang Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, served as moderator throughout the proceedings of the conference.

Recent intelligence from the law enforcement community disputes an earlier belief that gangs are becoming more organized or sophisticated as a result of the drug trade. "It is a myth that street gangs are well organized, with meeting halls, presidents, and boards of directors," Commander Kramer said. He compared the level of organization of most gang activity to that of pickup basketball games—whoever is available participates. "They don't sit down and develop a tactical plan," Kramer said.

This is true even for those gangs involved in drug dealing, according to Dr. Irving Spergel, who is overseeing an OJJDP-sponsored research project on youth gangs. Spergel said that while the contemporary gang problem involves many more youths than in the past in the sale and distribution of narcotics, the extent to which the trafficking is carried out as part of an organized gang function remains unclear. In assessing the extent of the youth gang problem nationwide, Spergel found many gang members individually engaged in trafficking, but he said frequent examples of entire gangs involved in trafficking in an organized fashion do not exist.

He also indicated that thus far he has found no clear evidence that gang members' increased involvement in drug trafficking has led to increased violence in most communities. "The evidence suggests that most of the gang-related violence is still turf-based," he said.

Drugs influence gang activities

There is clear evidence, however, that the demand for drugs, especially crack cocaine, has led to the migration of Los Angeles gang members across the country, the formation of "instrumental gangs," and an increased number of violent gangs known as "Jamaican posses." Members of L.A. gangs have been identified in virtually all 50 States, according to Eddie Hill of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Hill stressed that this move is not because of a well-organized plan by gang leaders. "There is no organization. There is no head person in Los Angeles or San Diego or San Francisco telling a gang member to go from Los Angeles to your town, U.S.A," he said.

Rather, the spread of L.A. gangs is due in part to aggressive law enforcement efforts in Los Angeles and to the overabundance of cocaine flooding the market, resulting in reduced prices. The prospect of higher drug profits and less harassment from law enforcement lures gang members to other cities.

Confirming the lack of an organized gang drug network, John Featherly of the DEA said the majority of crack is distributed by low-level retail dealers, with no widespread wholesale or importation networks. This actually hampers law enforcement efforts because there are no large scale organizations to identify and target, he said.

Instrumental gangs emerging

The booming crack industry has also lead to the formation of "instrumental gangs"—gangs that form specifically for trafficking narcotics, Kramer said. These gangs are transporting L.A.-style gang activities from South Central Los Angeles to regional suburban areas nationwide.

The primary motive of instrumental gangs is profit, he said. "With an estimated $130 billion exchanged nationwide by drug dealers in 1987, it's easy to see why gangs have become involved in the narcotics trade," Kramer added.

To illustrate this even further, Kramer pointed out that last year the Los Angeles Police Department confiscated, in Los Angeles alone, more than $2 billion worth of narcotics, $36 million in cash, and more than 6 tons of cocaine.

Instrumental gangs, aware of how addictive crack is, sometimes throw lavish recruitment parties where they hand out free cocaine samples, according to Kramer, thus perpetuating their market and their profits.

These profits provide gang members with financial independence, allowing them to purchase legitimate enterprises and real estate with their illegal gains. The instrumental gangs, formed rapidly to capitalize on the illicit drug business, actively recruit juveniles, who provide protective insulation and shield older members from arrest and prosecution.

Posses extremely violent gangs

Jamaican posses are another type of gang whose growth in the United States is attributed to the drug trade. These Jamaican gangs are extremely violent groups organized for the sole purpose of drug trafficking. Unlike youth gangs, Jamaican posses are not composed primarily of juveniles.

The posses "are very organized...very transient...very violent," according to Charles Sarabyn of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF). More than 40 posses, with an estimated 10,000 members, are operating in every major metropolitan area in the United States today, Sarabyn said. He added that 1,400 homicides committed between January 1985 and July 1988 have been attributed directly to the posses. Seven hundred of those homicides occurred during a 1-year period, from July 1987 to July 1988.

Posses began migrating to the United States from Jamaica early in 1980, when they primarily trafficked in marijuana. In the mid-1980's, they turned to cocaine, using their already established trafficking network. In the mid- to late 1980's, they began trafficking in crack cocaine. Today, the DEA estimates that posses are responsible for 40 percent of the crack cocaine business in the United States.

Gangs affecting prisons

The growth of gangs has also led to a prevalence of gangs in prisons and juvenile institutions. In some cases, correctional institutions, while providing a short-term solution to illegal gang activities, have inadvertently helped gangs become more cohesive and increase membership within institutions, according to Spergel. Evidence also suggests that some gangs form in prison and then emigrate to the streets once gang members are released. Intimida-

tion of weaker inmates, extortion, intergang conflicts, and contracted inmate murders are some of the gang-related problems facing prison administrators today.

Community denial a problem

Although it is apparent that gang violence is growing, many continue to deny gangs exist in their communities. Kramer believes that "denial and apathy in far too many communities, including Los Angeles, have resulted [in] and contributed to inertia and inaction." Hague reported that Miami officials, too, initially denied the existence of a gang problem.

Before a community can develop an effective response to its gang problem, community leaders must stop denying gangs exist, Kramer said.

Entire system must respond

To help communities effectively respond, representatives from OJJDP presented a design that policymakers from the participating 19 cities could use to build a strategy tailored to the gang problem in their communities. Although any community's strategy must be geared to its own gang problem, every community's strategy must be systemwide, i.e., must reach schools, courts, parents, and community leaders.

OJJDP identified prevention, intervention, and supervision as the three major components of the system that must be involved in developing and implementing a strategy. Each of these system components comprises a variety of agencies and/or institutions that contribute to the component's operation. For example, the institutions within prevention include schools, law enforcement, recreation, mental health, housing, community agencies, and churches. Law enforcement, prosecution, and the courts are included in the intervention component, while the supervision component includes correctional agencies, probation, and parole. It is not enough, however, for each of the three components to address the problem. They must coordinate their efforts, both **within** each component and **across** all three components. Not only must the prevention, intervention, and supervision components work together, the institutions or agencies within each component must coordinate their efforts as well. For example, schools, law enforcement, recreation, mental health, housing, community agencies, and churches—all part of the prevention component—must work together.

To help policymakers develop such a systemwide strategy, OJJDP has developed an eight-step process known as IDENTIFY (see box on this page).

OJJDP believes that any successful response to gang activity requires such a planning process to ensure a coordinated approach.

Identify the problem:
Specify the problem and the target location. Determine who is creating the problem, the specific nature of these activities, and where and when the problem is most intense.

Define the system components:
Determine which agencies in the community own the problem and have the authority and responsibility for solving it.

Enumerate policies, procedures, practices, programs, and resources:
Specify the existing agency policies and practices that address the problem, and resources that are or could be used to address the problem.

Needs clarification:
Compare information on the nature and extent of the problem with existing resources to determine additional policy, procedures, practices, and program and resource needs.

Target strategies:
Identify the policies, procedures, practices, and programs and integrate them into a coordinated strategy to respond to the problem.

Implementation plan:
Prepare a plan that defines the objectives, tasks, and resources to be dedicated by each participating agency for implementing the strategy.

Focus agency responsibilities:
Identify the specific activities of the strategy to be performed by each participating agency, define the role and responsibilities of each agency in implementing the activities, and ensure accountability.

Yell:
Each of the agencies should monitor and assess the implementation of the strategy, and make adjustments as needed (yelling as necessary to ensure readjustments are made).

Strategies to combat the gang problem

Conference presenters also shared several strategies that could be utilized by other communities designing a systemwide response.

Kramer reiterated that the first step in any strategy must be to overcome "the political denial that gangs exist in your community." He also recommended that law enforcement agencies develop intelligence gathering and information-sharing capabilities. And above all, he said, all of the agencies in the community must target hardcore gang members. This creates "a vacuum within the leadership of the gang, which gives you the opportunity to intervene and divert

younger members to other activities and prevent other youth from joining," Kramer said.

His final recommendation: do not tolerate graffiti. Graffiti are messages from the gang to the community stating that the gang has taken the area to be theirs, Kramer said. By allowing the graffiti to stand, Kramer said, a community acquiesces to the gangs, saying in effect, "It's all right to be a gang member and I relinquish my property to you."

While studying Ohio gangs, Dr. Huff found one of the reasons the Columbus Police Department was relatively successful in responding to the gang problem was because it placed its four major gang control functions in one division. These functions—prevention, intelligence, enforcement, and investigation—are usually performed by different bureaus in most police departments. By consolidating them into a Youth Violence Crime Section, the Columbus Police Department improved intelligence gathering and information sharing to the point that all the officers in the section recognize all gang members on sight, according to Huff.

He also noted the significant role that police officers had played in the lives of some gang members. Ex-gang members told Huff that police officers who took a personal interest in them and interacted with them in nonarrest situations were often instrumental in their decisions to leave their gangs.

Schools have critical role

Schools must play an important role in a community's strategy to respond to gangs. This role, according to Huff, should include clear, firm disciplinary policies and practices. In his study Huff found that teachers who were fair but firm were not the ones who were assaulted; rather, teachers who backed down were the ones assaulted.

Dr. Ronald Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center, identified several school strategies critical to the war on gangs.

First, schools must establish clear expectations about acceptable behavior. "We tend not only to get what we deserve, what we expect, but also what we put up with in terms of the kind of intimidation that occurs on a school campus," Stephens said. He also stressed the importance of maintaining a visible staff on campus to create a sense of safety and to send a message to gang members that they do not control the schools. Parent involvement is also critical, Stephens said. "Many parents don't even know that their kids are in gangs," he added.

Echoing OJJDP's conviction, Spergel emphasized the need for schools to be part of a community's coordinated effort. Early findings from his research indicate, he said, that diverse criminal justice agencies, community organizations, and schools, must do a better job of working together on the gang issue.

Prevention efforts must be increased

Ira Reiner, District Attorney of Los Angeles, strongly advocates dramatically increasing prevention efforts. "Simply put, we have to get to kids before they get into gangs....Once they are caught up in the violent world of the gang culture they are, for the most part, lost forever," he said.

Such a prevention orientation involves nothing less than changing the way the juvenile justice system works, according to Reiner. "Currently, the system gives the least amount of attention to the youngest kids who have committed the least serious offenses. Conversely, the greatest amount of attention is given to the older kids who have committed the more serious offenses," he said. "The juvenile justice system has unwittingly, but affirmatively, nurtured several generations of young habitual criminals," Reiner added.

A young habitual offender, according to Reiner, is taught by the juvenile justice system that there are no consequences for violating the law, thus allowing crime to become a deeply embedded habit. The juvenile justice system currently operates "like a hospital that concentrates on terminal patients— for whom there is virtually no hope—at the expense of those who could be saved through early treatment," Reiner said.

He believes that youthful offenders should be given intensive attention the very first time that they come to the attention of law enforcement. Status offenses (those actions that would not be offenses if committed by adults) ought to be viewed as "precursors of ultimately serious and habitual criminal behavior—and dealt with accordingly," according to Reiner.

Captain Michael Frazier of the Phoenix Police Department stressed prevention and community involvement as necessary parts of the war on gangs. He told the conference that Phoenix law enforcement thought it had solved its gang problem in 1986 when the number of gangs dropped to an all time low of 31. However, in 1987, the city began seeing a rapid influx of Los Angeles gang members. Their increased presence, he said, has brought a dramatic increase in the level of violence.

He believes part of the solution is to provide early education aimed at preventing youth from joining gangs. Another critical strategy he said is community involvement. "Communities have got to realize that a gang problem is not just a police problem .... It's everybody's problem," he stressed.

Legislation increasing the sanctions for gang-related violence and weapons violations is critical, as is interagency coordination, Frazier said. Phoenix recently formed an Interagency Task Force involving the DEA, FBI, and several local law enforcement agencies, to address the Crips and the Bloods (two Los Angeles gangs) exclusively, according to Frazier.

In conclusion

The consensus among the experts is that youth gang violence continues to escalate, despite law enforcement's intensive efforts to curb it. Much of this violence is spurred by gang members' involvement in drug trafficking. However, contrary to earlier beliefs, gangs apparently are not becoming more

organized or sophisticated as a result of their drug dealing. Rather they are loosely knit, organizing around territorial or cultural lines.

The increase in illegal gang activity has made it clear that the entire system, not just law enforcement, must address the youth gang problem in a coordinated, comprehensive manner. Public and private agencies involved in prevention, intervention, and supervision activities must work together to prevent and control youth gang violence. To do less is to allow an infectious problem to spread.

This *Bulletin* was written by Dan Bryant, a Social Science Program Specialist with OJJDP, and edited by Kay McKinney, a writer-editor and Special Assistant to the OJJDP Administrator.

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